IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend claims 3-5, 7-15, 17, 18, and 20-25, as follows:

1. (Original) A method for the separation of cell fractions, comprising normal cells and altered cells, comprising the step of incubating the mixture of normal cells and altered cells in a hypotonic solution and the destruction of one or more cell fractions thereof.

2. (Original) A method according to claim 1, further comprising the subsequent step of collecting the non-destroyed cell fraction.

3. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1 ~~or 2~~, further comprising the subsequent step of analysis of the cells of the collected cell fractions.

4. (Original) A method according to claim 3, wherein the analysis of the derived cells is through polymerase chain reaction (PCR).

5. (Currently Amended) A method according to ~~any one of the preceding claims;~~ claim 1, wherein the mixture of normal cells and altered cells is derived from bodily fluids or tissue.

6. (Original) A method according to claim 5, where the bodily fluid is selected from the group comprising blood, urine cerebrospinal fluid, bone marrow, lymph, ascites and sputum.

7. (Currently Amended) A method according to ~~any one of the preceding claims;~~ claim 1, wherein the altered cells are tumor cells.

8. (Currently Amended) A method according to ~~any one of the preceding claims;~~ claim 1, wherein the tumor cells are circulating and/or micrometastatic tumor cells.

9. (Currently Amended) A method according to ~~any one of the preceding claims,~~ claim 1, wherein the normal cells are only mononuclear cells from the blooc.

10. (Currently Amended) A method according to ~~any one of the preceding claims,~~ claim 1, wherein the tumor cells are selected from the group consisting of the group of solid malignant tumors of epithelial origin (carcinomas).

11. (Currently Amended) A method according to ~~any one of the preceding claims,~~ claim 1, wherein the osmolality of the hypotonic solution is below 100 mosm/kg.

12. (Currently Amended) A method according to ~~any one of the preceding claims,~~ claim 1, wherein the hypotonic solution is a salt solution selected from the salts NaCl, Kcl, NH_2Cl, Phosphate Buffered Saline (PBS), Hank's Balanced Salt Solution (HBBS) or mixtures thereof.

13. (Currently Amended) A method according to ~~any one of the preceding claims,~~ claim 1, wherein the hypotonic solution further contains enzymes that degrade nucleic acid and/or protein-degrading enzymes.

14. (Currently Amended) A method according to ~~any one of the preceding claims,~~ claim 1, wherein the hypotonic solution further contains Rnase.

15. (Currently Amended) A method according to ~~any one of claims 3 to 14,~~ claim 3, wherein the analysis of the derived cells comprises the determination of the expression of a tumor marker.

16. (Original) A method according to claim 15, wherein the tumor marker is selected from cytokeratin 18 (CK18), cytokeratin 19 (CK19), cytokeratin 20 (CK20) and further members of the cytokeratin family, carcinoembryonic antigen (CEA), ErbB2, ErbB3, epithellal mucin-1, epithelial mucin-18, guanylyl cyclase C, Cdx-1, Cdx-2, prostate specific antigen (PSA), prostate specific membrane antigen (PSMA), sucrose isomaltase,

lactase, carbonic anhydrase, typrosinase, thyroglubulin, tyrosine hydroxylase, neurone specific glycoprotein, Desmoplakin l, epithelial glycoprotein 40 and gastrointestinal associated-associate antigen.

17. (Currently Amended) Use of a method according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 16;~~ claim 1, to detect the presence of altered cells, in particular tumor cells.

18. (Currently Amended) Use of a method according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 16;~~ claim 1, for the diagnosis of metastatic cancer.

19. (Original) Kit to detect the presence of tumor cells in a sample, comprising

a) a hypotonic solution, and

b) primer to detect the presence of mRNA coding for a tumor marker.

20. (Currently Amended) Kit according to claim 19, further comprising

c) ~~a~~ an RNA-stabilizing solution, comprising a highly-concentrated chaotropic salt.

21. (Currently Amended) Kit according to claim 19 ~~or 20,~~ wherein the hypotonic solution has an osmolality below 100 mosm/kg.

22. (Currently Amended) Kit according to ~~any one of the preceding claims,~~ claim 19, wherein the hypotonic solution is a salt solution, selected from the salts NaCl, Kcl, NH_3Cl, Phosphate Buffered Saline (PBS), Hank's Balanced Salt Solution (HBBS) and mixtures thereof.

23. (Currently Amended) Kit according to ~~any one of the preceding claims,~~ claim 19, for the diagnosis of matastatic cancer.

24. (Currently Amended) Kit according to ~~any one of the preceding claims,~~ claim 19, wherein the marker is selected from the group comprising cytokeratin 18 (CK18),

cytokeratin 19 (CK19), cytokeratin 20 (CK20) and further members of the cytokeratin family, carcinoembryonic antigen (CEA), ErbB2, ErbB3, epithelial mucin-1, epithelial mucin-18, guanylyl cyolase C, Cdx-1, Cdx-2, prostate specific antigen (PSA), prostate specific membrane antigen (PSMA), sucrose isomaltase, lactase, carbonic anhydrase, tyrosinase, throglubulin, tyrosine hydroxylase, neuron-specific glycoprotein, Desmoplakin 1, epithelial glycoprotein 40 and gastrointestinal associated, associated antigen.

25. (Currently Amended) Use of a kit according to ~~any one of claims 19 to 24~~, claim 19, to detect the presence of tumor cells in a sample.